



Engaging Teens Through Your Library Module 3: Ages & Stages

11-13 Year Olds

Physical Development & Abilities

- Fast approaching adulthood and bodies are changing rapidly
- There is a wide variation about how we are physically developing—some of us have hit growth spurts and some of us have not
- Due to the rapid changes of puberty, often feel uncomfortable about our bodies.
- Younger teens, especially girls, who have physically matured earlier, are sometimes the subject of unwanted attention from adolescents and adults. Just because these younger bodies seem more adult does not mean they are.

Cognitive Development

- Thinking has become more complex, and younger teens realize that most things don't have single, simple answers. These teens can think more abstractly, without needing concrete examples of demonstrations.
- Younger teens are becoming interested in the adult world, including political, social and environmental issues. These teens sense of fairness and justice is often quite strong.
- Although younger teens can plan ahead, they are still mostly unable to think in long-range terms and to consider the seemingly far off future.
- Younger teens may challenge rules attempt to manipulate adults, but they still want and need firm limits.

Language Development

- Younger teen vocabulary and language skills are expanding.
- Younger teens enjoy discussing and debating particularly concerning issues of fairness injustice.
- Younger teens are beginning to realize that sometimes the way they speak at home or with our friends is not necessarily appropriate in every setting.

Social and Emotional Development

- Friends are very important to younger teens. They have begun to develop a few lasting close friendships and also occasionally have conflicts with friends and power struggles and groups. These issues can seem like the most important thing in the world.
- Younger teens want privacy with our friends to discuss the changes they are going through.
- Younger teens are interested in boys or girls in curious about sex and sexuality.
- Younger teens do not want to be associated with anything that is considered to be for kids. however they may actually still enjoy playing games and hearing stories
- Younger teens want opportunities to contribute.
- Younger teens experience many mood swings in varying energy levels, along with the rapid physical changes they are going through.

Tips for Library Staff: 11-13 Year Olds

- Provide opportunities for younger teens to discuss issues that are important to them and to express their opinions.
- Give younger teens their own space. Respect their privacy while still letting them know if you are available.
- Do not single younger teens out in front of their peers for praise or criticism.
- Provide opportunities for younger teens to participate in community service, work in groups and make things creatively.



14-18 Year Olds

Physical Development & Abilities

- Most older teens have overcome the awkwardness of puberty and are approaching physical maturity
- Some older teens—especially boys—are still experiencing growth spurts and their voices deepen.
- Acne, weight, exercise, and other physical changes make older teens worry and self-conscious.
- Older teens are very concerned with body image.

Cognitive Development

- Older teens are capable of high levels of abstract thought and solving complex problems. They need learning and activities to be meaningful, complex, and challenging.
- Older teens think about the meaning of life and enjoy having philosophical discussions. They are developing their own personal philosophies.
- Setting and attaining goals is important to older teens.
- Older teens are better able to plan for the future and to imagine the future consequences of their actions. They have started thinking about our future goals and ambitions, including career and post-secondary aspirations.
- Older teens are very curious and may experiment with drugs, alcohol, tobacco and other risky behaviors.

Language Development

- Older teens enjoy discussing and debating, particularly concerning issues of moral rights and privileges and the meaning of life.
- Older teens are realizing that sometimes the way one speaks at home or with friends is not appropriate in every setting.
- Older teens want to become experts in their chosen art and forms of self-expression such as music, poetry, drama, visual arts, and creative writing.

Social & Emotional Development

- Older teens are learning more about ourselves and are figuring out how we fit into the world and how others see them. Older teens try out different answers to the question, “Who Am I?” At different points in their identity formation older teens may feel uncertain about our gender, sexual, religious, ethnic and/or racial identities.
- Older teen’s friends remain very important but their social networks are growing.
- Older teens social standing is important and they want to be recognized as unique individuals.
- Older teens care about the well-being of others and are developing a community consciousness, including a sense of social justice.
- Older teens are gaining our independence and further distancing selves from our parents.
- Developing self-confidence is important to older teens, as receiving respect for their skills and contributions.
- Older teens often want to take on adult leadership roles and demonstrate knowledge and skills.

Tips for Library Staff: 14-18 Year Olds

- Give older teens opportunities to demonstrate independence and skills by involving them in the planning of our learning experiences and giving them adult responsibilities.
- Push older teens to stretch their thinking by providing us with real life problems to solve, make decisions, reflect, and evaluate.
- Give older teens opportunities to positively contribute to their communities.
- Hold older teens to high standards and hold them accountable for the success or failure of their plans.
- Challenge older teens on their thinking identity, values and beliefs.
- Encourage older teens with learning experiences related to self-discovery, self-understanding, and getting along with others.
- Help older teens plan for their futures by providing guidance on and exposure to career and post-secondary options.



- Don't make comments criticizing an older teen's appearance, and give them opportunities to critically examine media messages about what is considered "normal."
- Answer older teen's questions and give them information about sex, relationships, and health without judging or minimizing their opinions.